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DEMON SWORD

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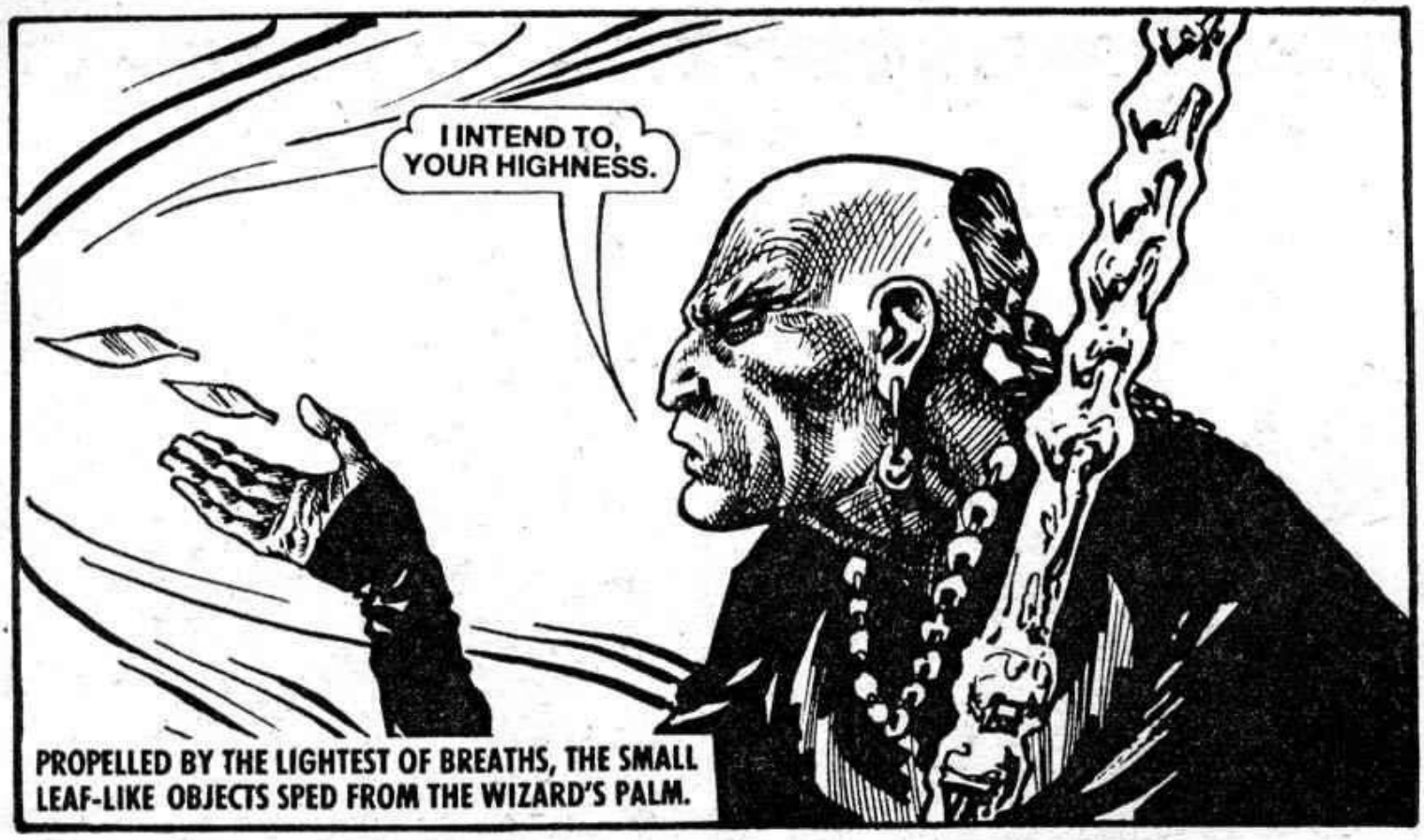
DEMON SWORD

ON ANOTHER EARTH, IN ANOTHER TIME, YOUNG PRINCE VEYNE RALLIED HIS LATE FATHER'S FORCES AGAINST THE LEGIONS OF SUBARAX THE DEFILER.
AT THEM, MEN OF ANGLERRE!

SUBARAX! YOUR LEGIONS FALTER. WIZARD — PREPARE TO MEET WHATEVER DEMONS YOU WORSHIP, FACE TO FACE!
AH — THE MORTAL PRINCELING. YOU SHOULD BE WARY OF APPEARANCES, YOUR HIGHNESS. TAKE HIM!
THE THREE SCALEY THINGS AT THE PRIEST-KING'S FEET SHAMBLED FORWARD.

THE PRIEST-KING'S CREATURES FELL ON VEYNE, BUT COULD NOT PREVAIL AGAINST HIS SKILL.
YOU'LL HAVE TO DO BETTER THAN THAT, DEVIL'S-SPAWN!
WHOOSH!


I INTEND TO, YOUR HIGHNESS.
PROPELLED BY THE LIGHTEST OF BREATHS, THE SMALL LEAF-LIKE OBJECTS SPED FROM THE WIZARD'S PALM.

WITH DAZZLING SPEED, THE DEADLY BLADES FOUND THEIR MARK.
VISHENA! IT BURNS!

BUT EVEN AS VEYNE REELED, CAPTAIN SALADOTH, ABARIAN COMMANDER OF THE ROYAL BODYGUARD, LEAPT TO HIS DEFENCE.
ARCHERS — SHOOT THAT DEMON-SPAWNED WIZARD! HOLD ON, MY PRINCE, I'M COMING.

BUT THE ARROWS FOUNDERED ON AN INVISIBLE SHIELD.
A VAIN GESTURE, CAPTAIN. THE BOY IS MINE!

COMMEND YOUR SOULS TO WHATEVER GOD YOU CHOOSE, VANQUISHED ONES. IN A MOMENT, ANGLERRE IS MINE.
A GLOW OF UNEARTHLY POWER BEGAN TO PLAY AROUND THE PRIEST-KING.

ZAP!
WHAT IN THE NAME OF CHA'ITAN . . .?
BUT THE SPELL WAS NEVER RELEASED, AS A BOLT OF MAGICAL FORCE STRUCK HIM.

IN A CRACKLING OF MAGICAL ENERGY, A MOUNTED FIGURE APPEARED.
NOT IN YOUR DEMON'S NAME, SUBARAX — BUT RATHER THE NAME OF VISHENA!
IT WAS MYRDAN, PRINCE VEYNE'S MAGICIAN-SAGE. A MAN OF GREAT POWER, AND EVEN GREATER MYSTERY.

RETREAT TO SAFETY, CAPTAIN SALADOTH! I CAN HOLD THEM OFF AS LONG AS SUBARAX REMAINS STUNNED!
I HOPE SO, WIZARD.
INCH BY INCH, THEY CARRIED THE PRINCE TO SAFETY.

BY A MIRACLE THEY NURSED THE INJURED PRINCE SAFELY BACK INSIDE THE WALLS OF VOST'R.
INSIDE, QUICKLY! THEY'VE BROKEN THROUGH — SUBARAX MUST HAVE COME ROUND!

PRINCE VEYNE WAS RAPIDLY TAKEN TO SALADOTH, THE SHERIFF OF VOSTR'S HOUSE, WHERE MYRDAN TENDED HIM.
WELL, MYRDAN?
THE WOUNDS ARE SORCEROUS, HIGHNESS. I'VE CLEANED THEM OUT SO THE CONTAGION WON'T SPREAD, BUT THEY WON'T HEAL.

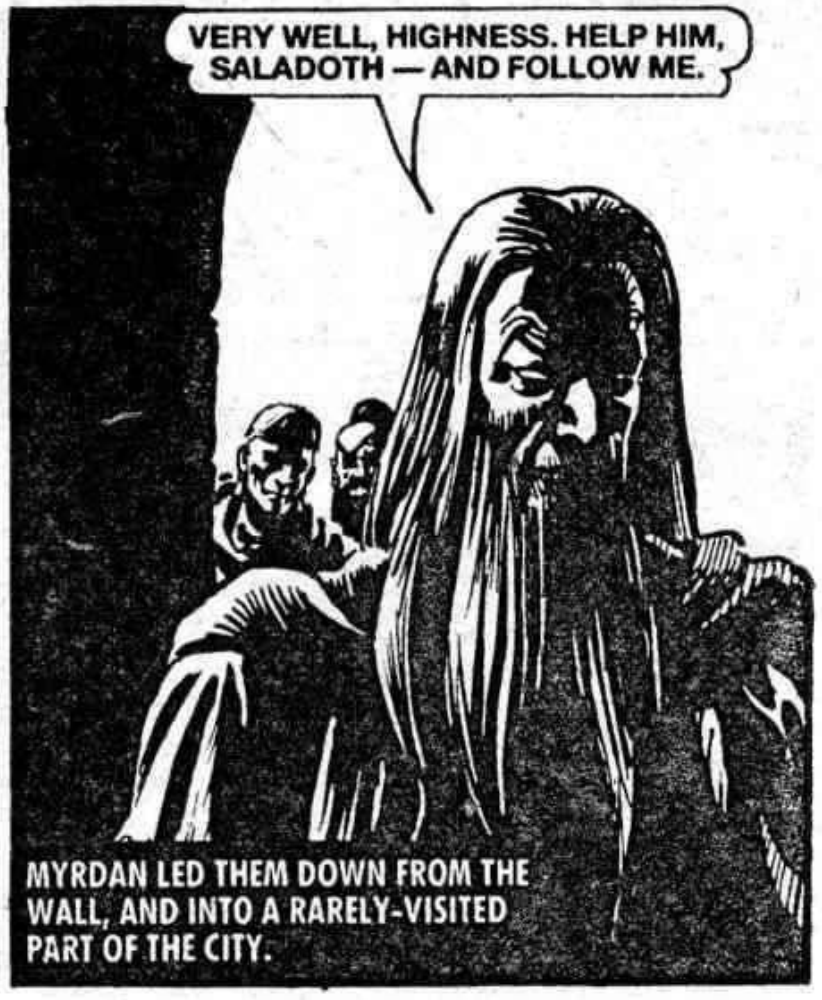
IT LOOKS LIKE WE MAY HAVE TO CANCEL THE CORONATION.
NEVER, MY PRINCE! A LITTLE REST, AND YOU'LL BE KING OF ANGLERRE YET!
BEFORE HE COULD ARGUE FURTHER, VEYNE DRIFTED INTO SLEEP.

YOU'RE SECOND IN COMMAND, MAGICIAN. WHAT DO YOU PROPOSE NOW?
I HAVE THOUGHTS. COME WITH ME!

FROM VOST'R'S BATTLEMENTS, THEY LOOKED AT THE BESIEGING FORCES.
SUBARAX CANNOT BREACH THE WALLS I'VE ERECTED, AND HIS RAGGED ARMY SEEMS ILL-EQUIPPED TO ATTACK A DEFENDED CITY. I THINK WE CAN WAIT IT OUT, CAPTAIN.
A PLAGUE ON THEIR ARMY! WHAT ABOUT PRINCE VEYNE?
I CAN THINK OF ONLY ONE WAY TO SAVE VEYNE AND DEFEAT SUBARAX. THE PRINCE WILL HAVE TO PETITION THE GOD CHULT'R FOR THE GOLDEN SWORD,CERASTES, WITH ITS GIFT OF INVULNERABILITY FOR ITS OWNER.
ARE YOU MAD? HAVE YOU NEVER HEARD OF THE CURSE THAT IS SAID TO BE CARRIED WITH THAT SWORD?
YES! BUT WOULD YOU RATHER THE PRINCE WAS CRIPPLED FOR LIFE, AND SUBARAX TRIUMPHANT?
I DON'T LIKE IT WHEN FRIENDS TRY TO EXCLUDE ME, MYRDAN. I'LL HEAR MORE OF THIS.

MY PRINCE! YOU SHOULDN'T BE OUT OF BED . . .!
SPARE ME THE SERMON NOW, MYRDAN, SINCE YOUR SLEEP-SPELLS APPEAR SO INEFFECTIVE, I THINK YOU SAID SOMETHING ABOUT A SWORD, AND SUBARAX'S DEFEAT.

THERE IS A CHANCE, HIGHNESS, BUT AS YOU MAY HAVE HEARD CAPTAIN SALADOTH SAY — THERE'S DANGER IN IT.
FORGET THE DANGER! I'M TALKING ABOUT ANGLERRE'S FATE!


VERY WELL, HIGHNESS. HELP HIM, SALADOTH — AND FOLLOW ME.
MYRDAN LED THEM DOWN FROM THE WALL, AND INTO A RARELY-VISITED PART OF THE CITY.

THEY APPROACHED A DECAYING, DESERTED MERCHANT'S HOUSE.
THIS USED TO BELONG TO AYDAN THE MERCHANT, AN OLD FRIEND OF YOUR FATHER'S, HIGHNESS. THE LATE KING LEFT MANY THINGS HERE THAT HE WANTED KEPT SECRET.

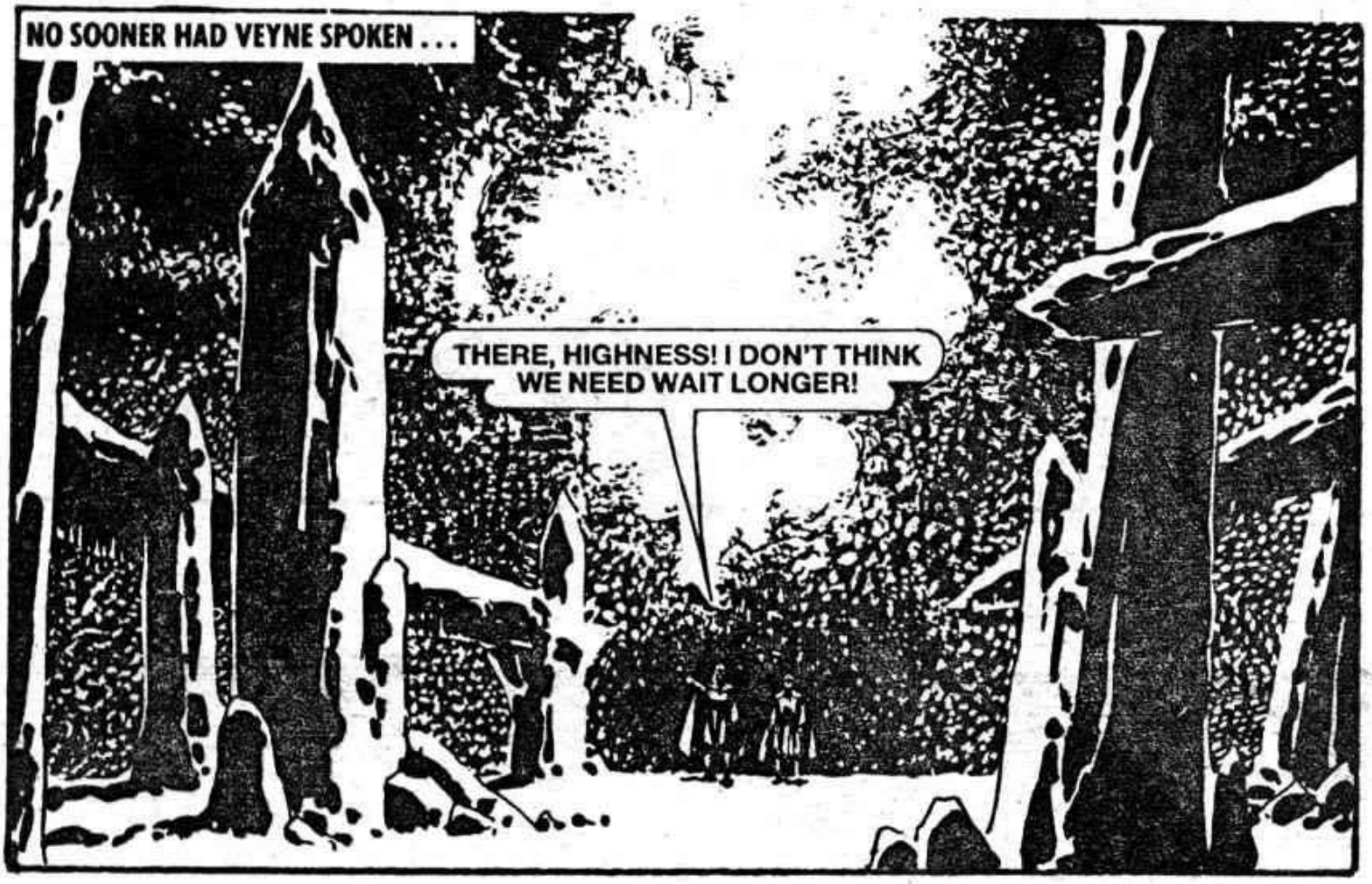
ONCE, ON A TRIP ABROAD, TO YOUR HOME LAND OF ABARA, I BELIEVE, CAPTAIN, KING IAGON CAME ACROSS A MANUSCRIPT THAT INTRIGUED ME GREATLY.
I DON'T BELIEVE THAT, WIZARD. ABARIANS HAVE NO TIME FOR SORCERY!
MYRDAN SMILED, BUT SAID NOTHING.

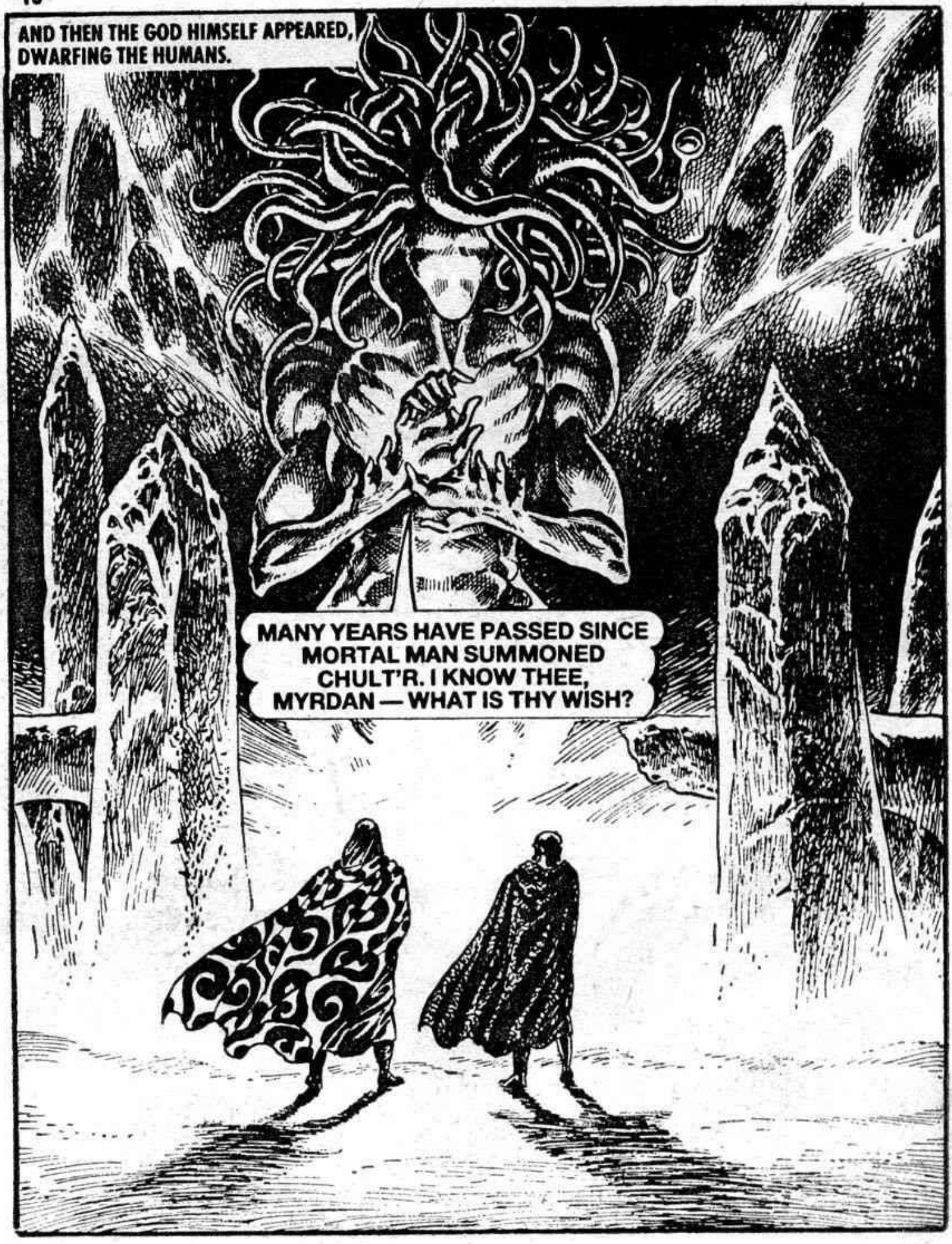
HERE IT IS! YOUR HIGHNESS, THE SWORD CERASTES IS ONE OF THE SEVEN GIFTS TO MAN FROM THE GODS. IT CONFERS INVULNERABILITY UPON WHOEVER BECOMES ITS OWNER. THIS PARCHMENT DETAILS HOW TO REACH THE GOD CHULT'R AND ASK FOR THE SWORD.
HAVEN'T YOU FORGOTTEN THE CURSE, WIZARD?
VEYNE STIRRED UNEASILY IN HIS SEAT.
THE CURSE IS SIMPLE, HIGHNESS. AFTER AN UNSPECIFIED PERIOD OF PROVIDING ULTIMATE PROTECTION TO ITS OWNER, CERASTES WILL ONE DAY KILL THAT PERSON ITSELF.
BUT UNTIL THAT DAY, NOTHING AND NO ONE CAN HARM THE OWNER OF THE MAGICAL SWORD?
THEN THERE IS NO QUESTION, GENTLEMEN! FOR THE SAKE OF ANGLERRE, I MUST HAVE CERASTES!
MY PRINCE, I BEG OF YOU TO RECONSIDER!
NO — I MUST DO IT!

MYRDAN READ ALOUD FROM THE PARCHMENT, MAKING OCCULT PASSES IN THE AIR AS HE DID SO. GRADUALLY, SOMETHING BEGAN TO FORM.
CHELANDA ABANAI Y'GOTH! ERROI! ERROI!

THE SHRINE OF CHULT'R. SHALL WE GO ON, HIGHNESS?
WE'VE COME THIS FAR, MYRDAN, IT WOULD BE A SHAME NOT TO FINISH IT.
THE TWO MEN STEPPED FORWARD, THROUGH THE MYSTICAL PORTAL AND ENTERED A NEW WORLD.

THE ALIEN DIMENSION WAS EERILY QUIET, AND THE MEN'S VOICES ECHOED LOUDLY.
WE MUST STAND HERE AND WAIT, HIGHNESS. CHULT'R KNOWS WE'VE ARRIVED.
THEN I HOPE HE COMES SOON, THIS QUIET'S UNNERVING.


NO SOONER HAD VEYNE SPOKEN . . .
THERE, HIGHNESS! I DON'T THINK WE NEED WAIT LONGER!


AND THEN THE GOD HIMSELF APPEARED, DWARFING THE HUMANS.
MANY YEARS HAVE PASSED SINCE MORTAL MAN SUMMONED CHULT'R. I KNOW THEE, MYRDAN — WHAT IS THY WISH?

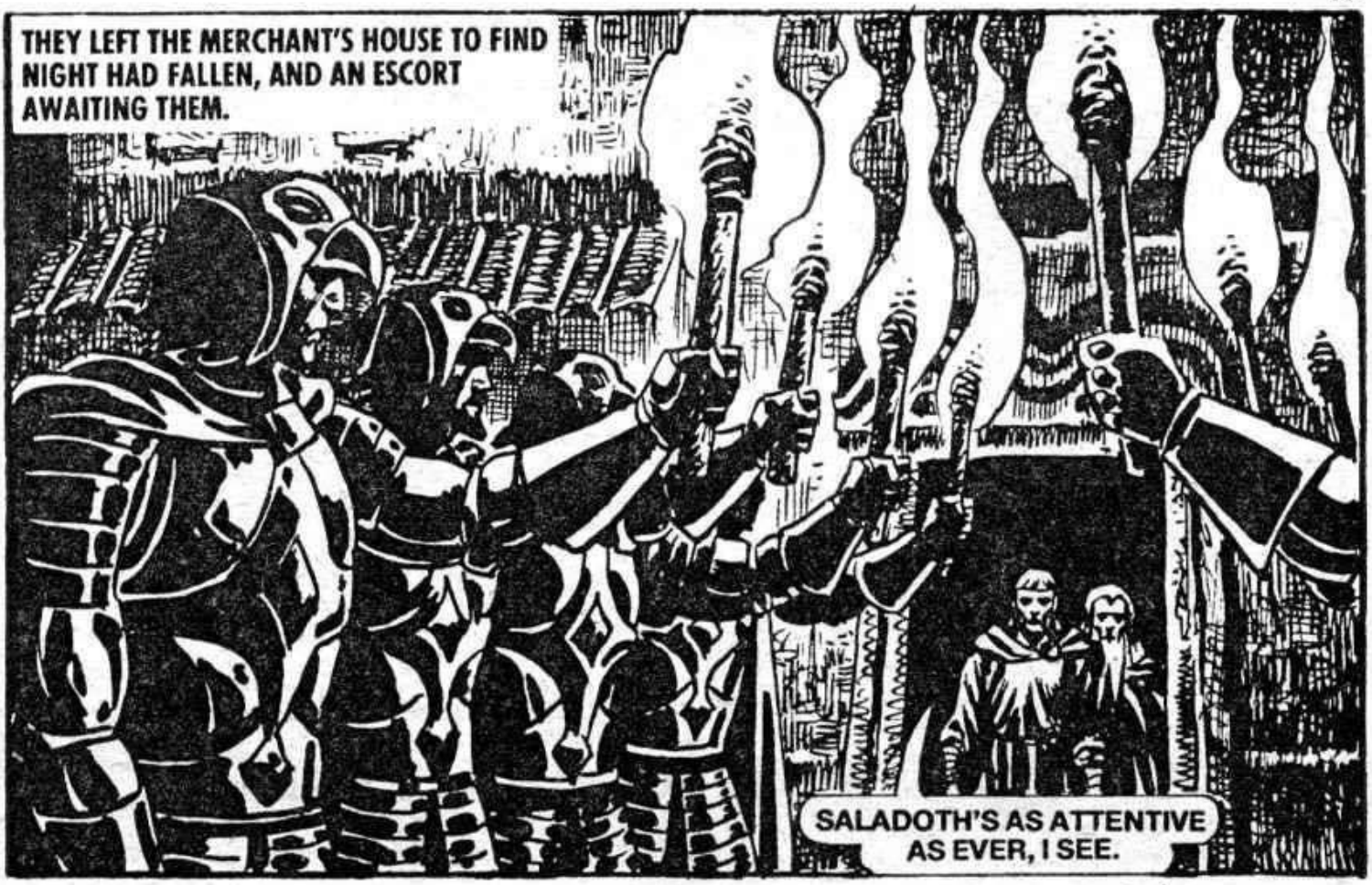
NOT FOR ME AM I HERE, LORD CHUL'TR, BUT THE MORTAL PRINCE VEYNE D'ANNEMARC OF ANGLERRE. IT IS VITAL TO HIM THAT THOU DOST GRANT HIM THE SWORD CERASTES.
VEYNE HELD HIS BREATH AS THE GIANT GOD PAUSED.

THE GOLDEN SWORD? ART THOU AWARE OF THE FATE THAT MAY BEFALL HE WHO CALLS THAT CURSED BLADE HIS OWN, MORTAL PRINCE?
I AM, LORD CHULT'R. I MUST TAKE THAT RISK!

THEN I MUST GIVE THEE THE SWORD. TAKE IT, AND GUARD THYSELF WELL BOTH WITH IT, AND AGAINST IT!
THANK YOU, LORD CHULT'R.

AS VEYNE TOOK THE SWORD, POWER SURGED INTO HIM, FILLING EVERY FIBRE OF HIS BODY. SUDDENLY HE FELT HE COULD RULE THE UNIVERSE.
BY THE GODS! I FEEL THE STRENGTH OF A THOUSAND MEN! AND MY WOUNDS ARE GONE!

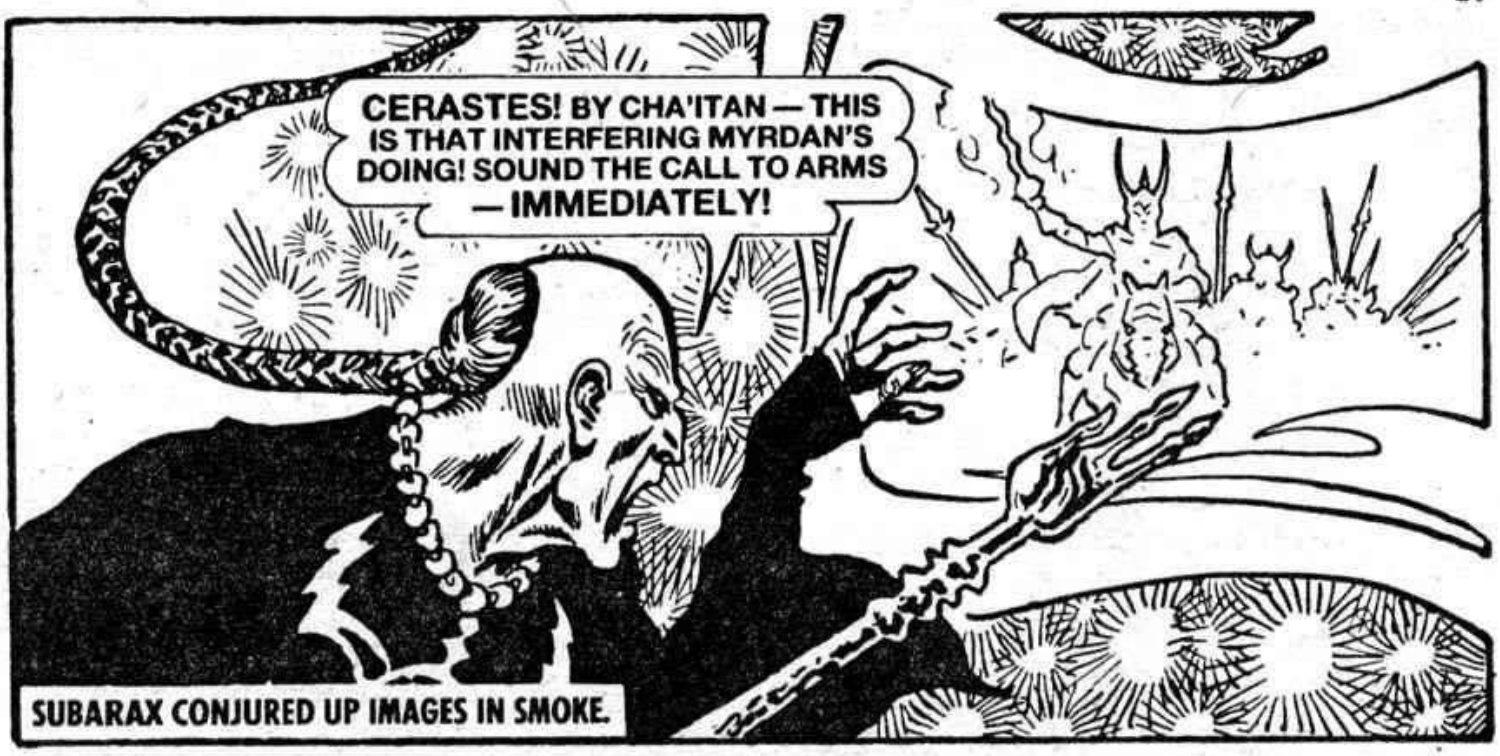
WE ARE BACK, HIGHNESS. CHULT'R IS FINISHED WITH US.
THE PRINCE WAS DEAF TO HIS MAGICIAN-SAGE'S WORDS. HE WAS STILL ENTRANCED IN THE WONDER OF HIS NEW, DANGEROUS TOY.


THEY LEFT THE MERCHANT'S HOUSE TO FIND NIGHT HAD FALLEN, AND AN ESCORT AWAITING THEM.
SALADOTH'S AS ATTENTIVE AS EVER, I SEE.

THE GUARDS' COMMANDER SUDDENLY THREW HIMSELF AT VEYNE'S FEET.
MY PRINCE, I ASK TO BE REMOVED FROM YOUR SERVICE. IT IS NOT MY PLACE TO QUESTION YOUR DECISIONS.
SALADOTH . . . YOUR QUESTIONS SOUND A NOTE OF CAUTION. RISE, AND FIGHT WITH ME.

BY TOMORROW EVENING, I SWEAR THAT SUBARAX'S HEAD WILL BE FOOD FOR THE CROWS ON VOST'R'S BATTLEMENTS!

AT DAWN, IN THE CAMP OF SUBARAX AND HIS UNGODLY HORDES.
MASTER, THE HUMAN ARMY HAS LEFT VOST'R AND IS APPROACHING ACROSS THE PLAIN. THE PRINCE IS IN THE FORE!
IMPOSSIBLE! HE SHOULD BE TOO CRIPPLED TO MOVE!

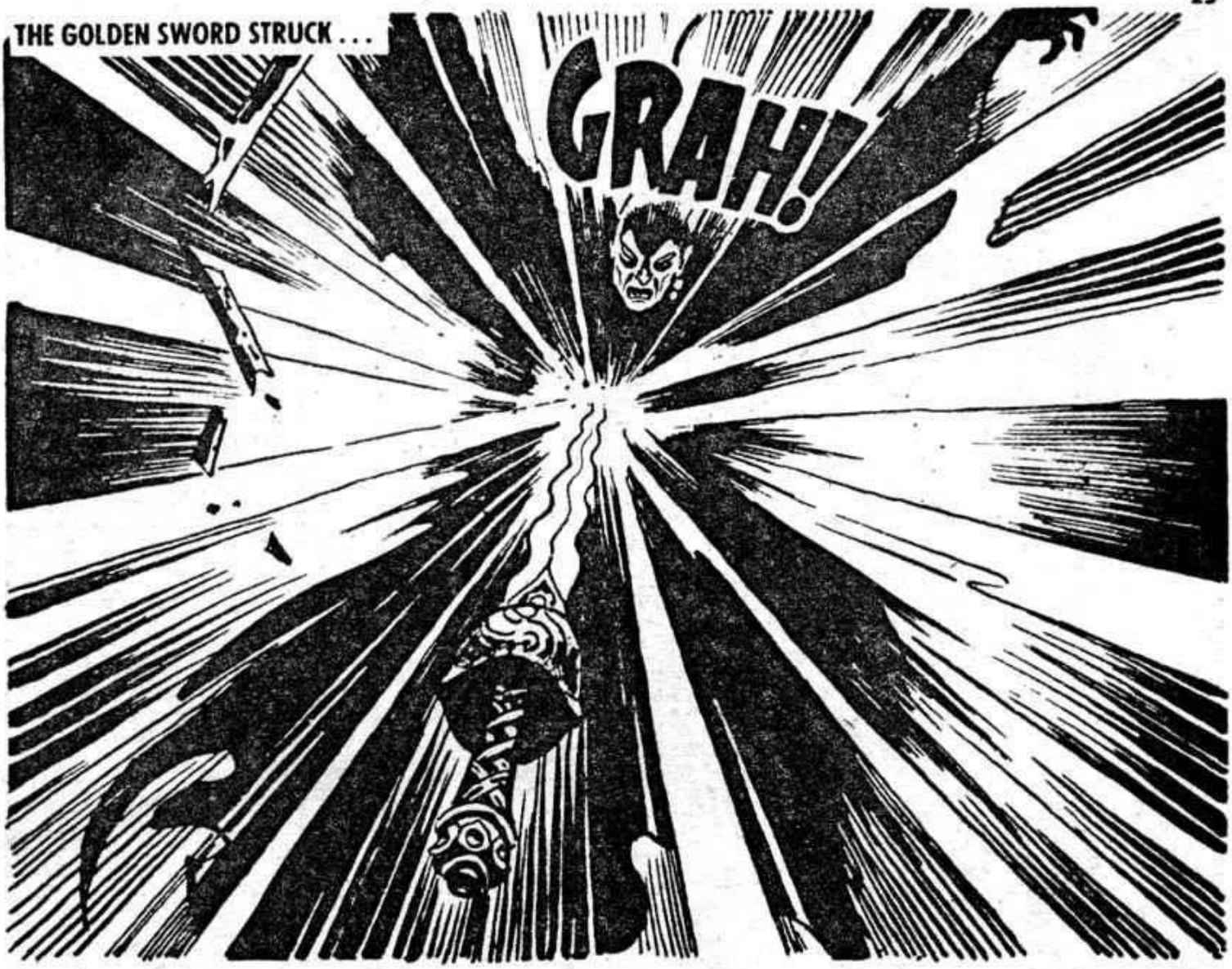

CERASTES! BY CHA'ITAN — THIS IS THAT INTERFERING MYRDAN'S DOING! SOUND THE CALL TO ARMS — IMMEDIATELY!
SUBARAX CONJURED UP IMAGES IN SMOKE.

IT SEEMS SUBARAX IS UNPREPARED TO WELCOME US, MY PRINCE.
LET'S NOT STAND ON CEREMONY, CAPTAIN. SOUND THE CHARGE!

LIKE AN AVENGING SCYTHE, THE ARMY OF ANGLERRE SWEPT INTO SUBARAX'S CAMP, DRIVING ALL BEFORE IT.

AS EVER, VEYNE WAS IN THE THICK OF IT, PROTECTED BY HIS GOLDEN SWORD'S ANCIENT MAGIC —
WHERE ARE YOU, SUBARAX? COME TO ME, PRIEST-KING! SURELY YOU'RE NOT AFRAID?
AFRAID OF YOU, PRINCELING? NATURALLY NOT — BUT I HAVE A HEALTHY RESPECT FOR THAT BODKIN YOU NOW CARRY.
A GLOW OF POWER BEGAN TO BUILD UP AROUND THE PRIEST-KING'S STAFF.
YOU'VE MET YOUR MATCH, EVIL — ONE YOU KNOW THE POWER OF THIS SWORD!
YES . . . BUT I TOO HAVE POWER!

A NETWORK OF SPARKING FORCE LEAPT UP FROM THE EARTH, IMPRISONING VEYNE.
CERASTES ONLY PROTECTS AGAINST A DIRECT ATTACK. IT CANNOT STOP A CONTAINMENT SPELL.
BUT YOUR MAGIC CANNOT STOP IT, SUBARAX!

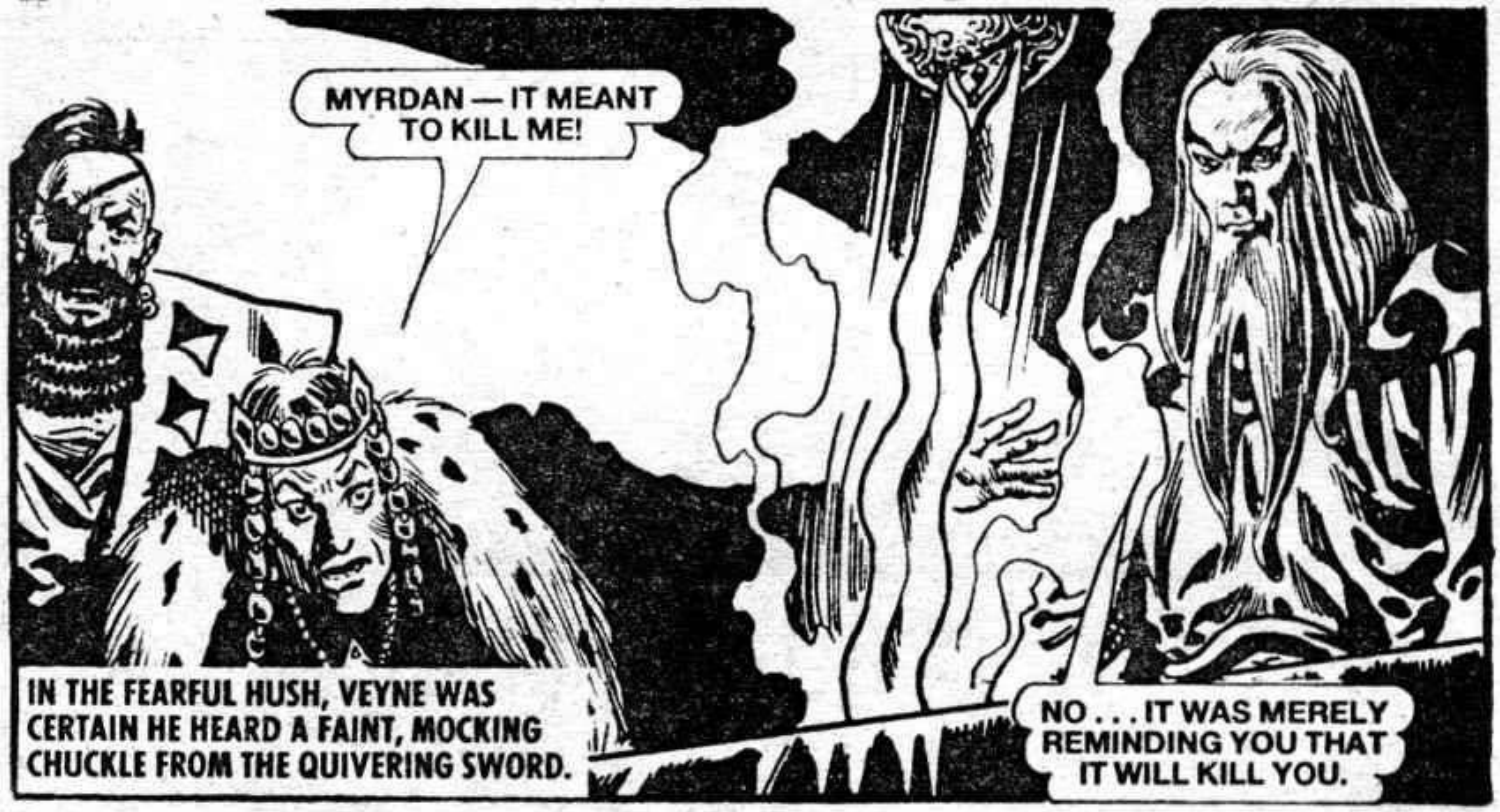

THE GOLDEN SWORD STRUCK . . .
GRAH!

SUBARAX'S HORDES FADED AND SWIRLED AWAY —
IT'S OVER! SUBARAX IS DEFEATED.

AND, AS HE HAD SWORN, VEYNE STAKED OUT SUBARAX'S HEAD ON THE WALLS OF VOST'R AS A WARNING —

TEN DAYS LATER, IN THE CAPITAL CITY OF ILLONDRE, VEYNE WAS CROWNED KING OF ANGLERRE, CONQUEROR OF SUBARAX AND CHAMPION OF THE GOD VISHENA.
LONG LIVE THE KING!
LONG LIVE THE KING!

LATER, THE COURT AND AMBASSADORS TO ANGLERRE FEASTED THE NEW KING IN HIS OWN PALACE.
MY LORDS, I ASK YOU TO DRINK A TOAST WITH ME.
AS THE COURT ROSE TO DRINK, ALMOST NO ONE HEARD THE FAINT GRATING OF STEEL AGAINST STONE BEHIND VEYNE.
SUBARAX IS DEFEATED, AND HIS POWER DESTROYED. LET US BE MAGNANIMOUS IN VICTORY AND PRAY FOR CONTINUED PEACE. GENTLEMEN, I GIVE YOU — PEACE.
MAJESTY — GET BACK!
TWANG!

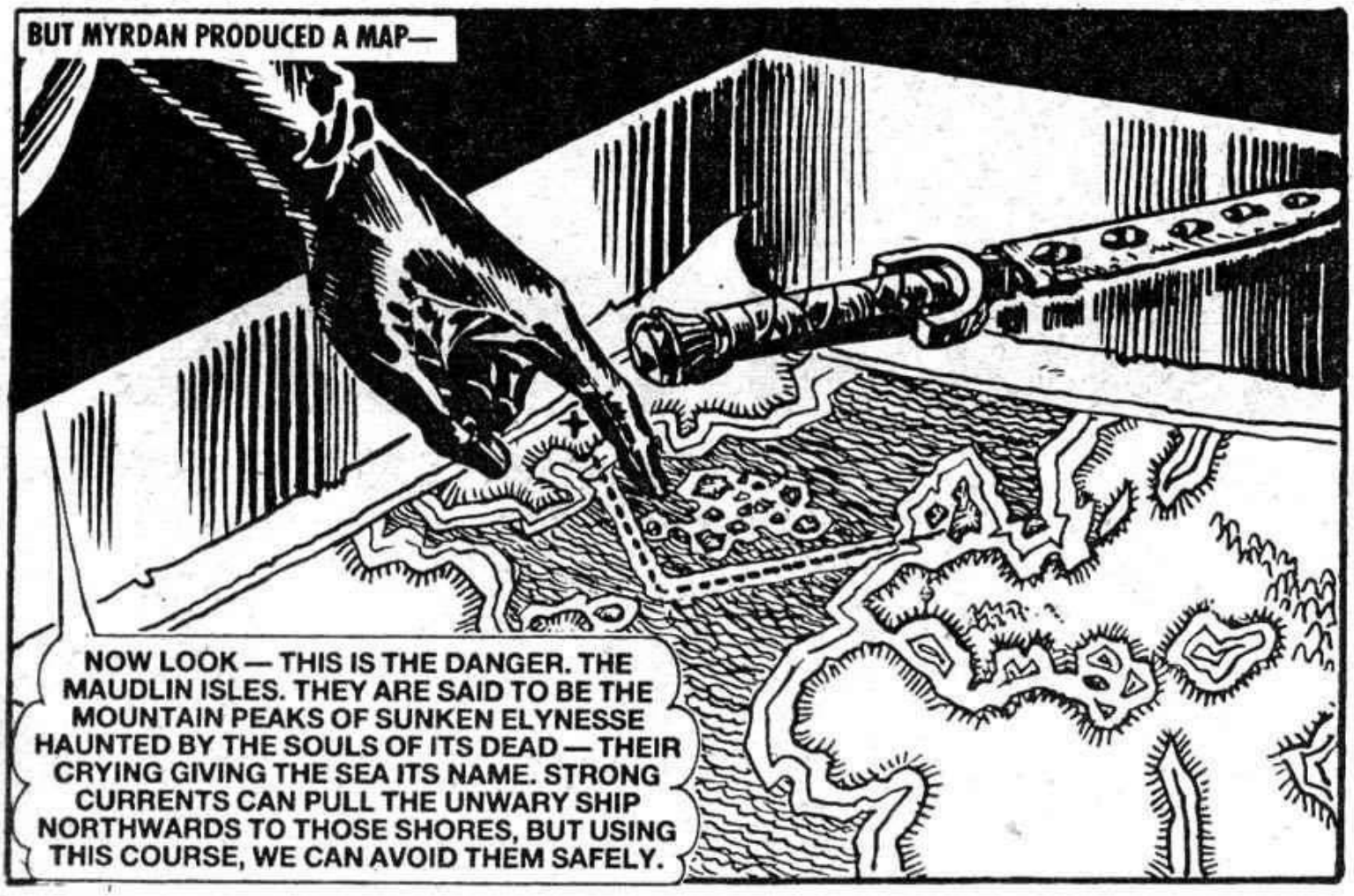

MYRDAN — IT MEANT TO KILL ME!
IN THE FEARFUL HUSH, VEYNE WAS CERTAIN HE HEARD A FAINT, MOCKING CHUCKLE FROM THE QUIVERING SWORD.
NO . . . IT WAS MERELY REMINDING YOU THAT IT WILL KILL YOU.

MUCH LATER, IN THE EVENING, AFTER THE FESTIVITIES HAD ENDED, VEYNE BROODED IN A QUIET CORNER OF THE PALACE.
SO, THE CURSE IS REAL, SALADOTH.
THOUGH MYRDAN AND I HAVE OUR DIFFERENCES, I TRUST HIM TO FIND THE ANSWER.

A SHARP RAP RESOUNDED SUDDENLY ON THE DOOR.
MAJESTY! I'VE BEEN BACK TO THE MERCHANT'S HOUSE AND YOUR FATHER'S PAPERS — AND I THINK I MAY HAVE FOUND SOMETHING!
SALADOTH TRIED NOT TO THINK HOW THE MAGICIAN-SAGE HAD TRAVELLED THE LENGTH OF ANGLERRE AND BACK SINCE THE FEAST.

THIS PARCHMENT SEEMS TO HAVE COME FROM ABARIA AS WELL. IT CLAIMS THAT THE CURSE OF CERASTES MAY BE LIFTED BY VISHENA, KING OF THE GODS — IN HIS TEMPLE IN L'AMERQ.
BOTH VEYNE AND SALADOTH DREW IN SHARP BREATHS AT THAT ANCIENT NAME.

L'AMERQ'S A MYTH, MYRDAN! AN OLD FAIRY TALE TO AMUSE CHILDREN.
AND EVEN IF TRUE, LEGEND PLACES IT BEYOND THE WAILING SEA. NO MAN MAY CROSS THAT AND KEEP HIS SANITY!

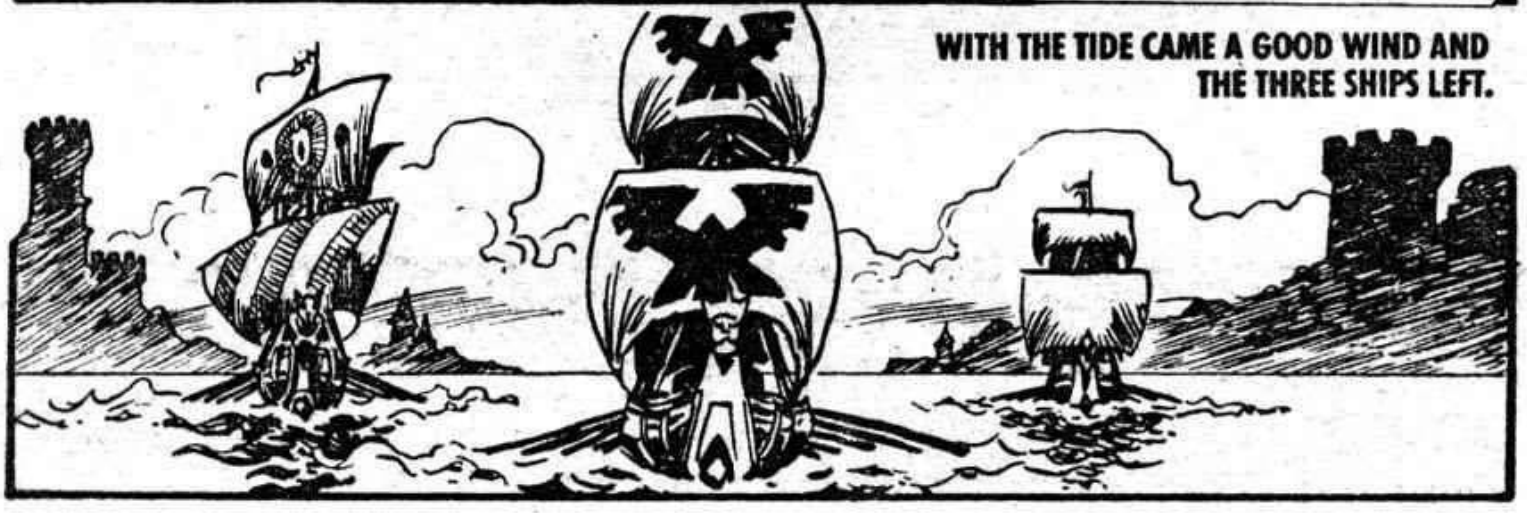

BUT MYRDAN PRODUCED A MAP—
NOW LOOK — THIS IS THE DANGER. THE MAUDLIN ISLES. THEY ARE SAID TO BE THE MOUNTAIN PEAKS OF SUNKEN ELYNESSE HAUNTED BY THE SOULS OF ITS DEAD — THEIR CRYING GIVING THE SEA ITS NAME. STRONG CURRENTS CAN PULL THE UNWARY SHIP NORTHWARDS TO THOSE SHORES, BUT USING THIS COURSE, WE CAN AVOID THEM SAFELY.

BY VISHENA, IF THERE'S A CHANCE, I'LL TAKE IT! ANGLERRE'S SAFE ENOUGH TO DO WITHOUT ME FOR A WHILE. I WANT SHIPS, CAPTAIN!
AS YOU WISH, MY PRINCE.

AND SO, BEFORE THE MONTH WAS OUT, THREE SHIPS WERE READY TO SAIL FROM THE WESTERN PORT OF BRIZTIL — THE WHITE WOLF, THE STARFIRE AND VEYN'S FLAGSHIP, THE ROYAL IAGON.

THE SHIP'S MASTER TELLS ME WE SHOULD BE READY TO SAIL ON THE MORNING TIDE, MYRDAN.
MUCH TO CAPTAIN SALADOTH'S CHAGRIN, MAJESTY. I FEAR ABARIANS MAKE POOR SAILORS.

HE'S A LOYAL FRIEND, MYRDAN — AS ARE YOU. IF I DON'T RETURN, I'VE MADE PROVISION FOR SALADOTH TO FORM A NEW GOVERNMENT.
I ASSURE YOU, THAT WON'T BE NECESSARY, MAJESTY.


WITH THE TIDE CAME A GOOD WIND AND THE THREE SHIPS LEFT.

WE MAKE GOOD SPEED ! L'AMERQ CAN'T BE MANY WEEKS AWAY AT SUCH A RATE!
AYE, MY PRINCE. IF ONLY THE PASSAGE WERE SMOOTHER!!

THE DAYS WORE ON AS THE SMALL FLEET HEADED INTO WARMER WATERS, A STIFF WIND CONSTANTLY FILLING THE SAILS.
I DON'T LIKE IT, WIZARD! I FEEL THAT CURSED BLADE IN THE FORECASTLE IS SOMEHOW DRAGGING US ALONG — EAGER TO REACH L'AMERQ.
FOR A PRACTICAL ABARIANS YOU'RE VERY SUPERSTITIOUS, CAPTAIN.

SUPERSTITION DOESN'T COME INTO IT . . .! HELLO, WHAT'S THIS?
WITH FRIGHTENING ABRUPTNESS, THE BREEZE FELL LEAVING THE SHIPS MOTIONLESS ON A FLAT SEA.

BUT BEFORE THE ORDER COULD BE GIVEN, AN AGONISED SCREAM RANG OUT FROM THE CROW'S NEST...

. . . AND A CREATURE, OUT OF DELIRIUM, CRASHED TO THE DECK.

FROM THE CLEAR SKY, A SWARM OF THE HIDEOUS CREATURES DROPPED ONTO THE SHIPS, AND ATTACKED . . .

IN THE CONFUSION, VEYNE FOUND HIMSELF ALONE —
THIS IS LIKE TAKING ON A WOLF WITH A TOOTH-PICK!

THEN HELP CAME — IN THE SHAPE OF VEYNE'S DEADLY PROTECTOR.
WHOOSH

RUSHING TO HIS HAND, THE SWORD BLAZED WITH EAGER LIGHT AS VEYNE BEGAN TO REAP A TERRIBLE HARVEST.

THEN SUDDENLY, FOR NO APPARENT REASON, THE HIDEOUS SWARM TOOK OFF INTO THE CLOUDLESS SKIES.

THE CREW BEGAN TO THROW THE DEAD OVERBOARD — SURPRISED AT HOW FEW HAD FALLEN TO THE CREATURES.

WE DROVE THEM OFF, MYRDAN! CERASTES SCARED THEM AWAY!

ON THE CONTRARY, MAJESTY. I FEAR THEY LEFT BECAUSE THEIR JOB WAS DONE. IT WOULD SEEM WE'RE NOW WELL CAUGHT BY THE CURRENT THAT FLOWS NORTHWARDS — TO THE MAUDLIN ISLES.

WATER THE COLOUR OF BLOOD STREAMED PAST THE SHIPS, DRAGGING AT THEIR HULLS.

UNSHIP OARS! WE'LL ROW OUT!
BUT THOUGH THE CREW PULLED THEIR HEARTS OUT, THEY COULD MAKE NO HEADWAY AGAINST THE CURRENT'S GRIP.

IT WOULD SEEM WE HAVE NO CHOICE BUT TO CHANCE THE MAUDLIN ISLES' UNCERTAIN WELCOME.

AND SO, AFTER SEVERAL DAYS' FRUITLESS STRUGGLE AGAINST THE CURRENT . . .

WITH NO ONE AT THE HELM, THE STARFIRE DRIFTED OFF COURSE — AND WAS RIPPED APART ON RAZOR-SHARP ROCKS.

AS THE FEW SURVIVORS STRUCK FOR SHORE, A CREATURE FROM MEN'S WORST NIGHTMARES ERUPTED AMONG THEM, TAKING A GRISLY TOLL.
GRAH

VEYNE WRITHED IN AGONY, RAGING AT HIS HELPLESSNESS.
A PLAGUE ON THIS NOISE! I CAN'T BLOCK IT OUT!
HIS DESPAIRING FINGERS FOUND THE HILT OF CERASTES, AND SILENCE ABRUPTLY FELL.
BY VISHENA! THE SWORD'S QUIETENED THAT AWFUL SOUND!

THE REMAINING TWO SHIPS DRIFTED INTO A ROCKY COVE, WHERE STRANGE EYES WATCHED IN THE SUDDEN, UNNATURAL SILENCE.

AS THE SHIPS BUMPED GENTLY AGROUND, STRANGE FIGURES SHAMBLED INTO VIEW.
SURVIVORS OF PAST WRECKS, DO YOU THINK, MYRDAN?
I THINK NOT, MAJESTY. THERE IS NOTHING LIVING HERE.
THE FIGURES WERE HIDEOUS, ANIMATED CORPSES, KNEELING IN REVERENCE ON THE STONEY BEACH.
HAIL VEYNE! THE BEARER OF THE GOLDEN BLADE! ELYNESSE WELCOMES THEE!

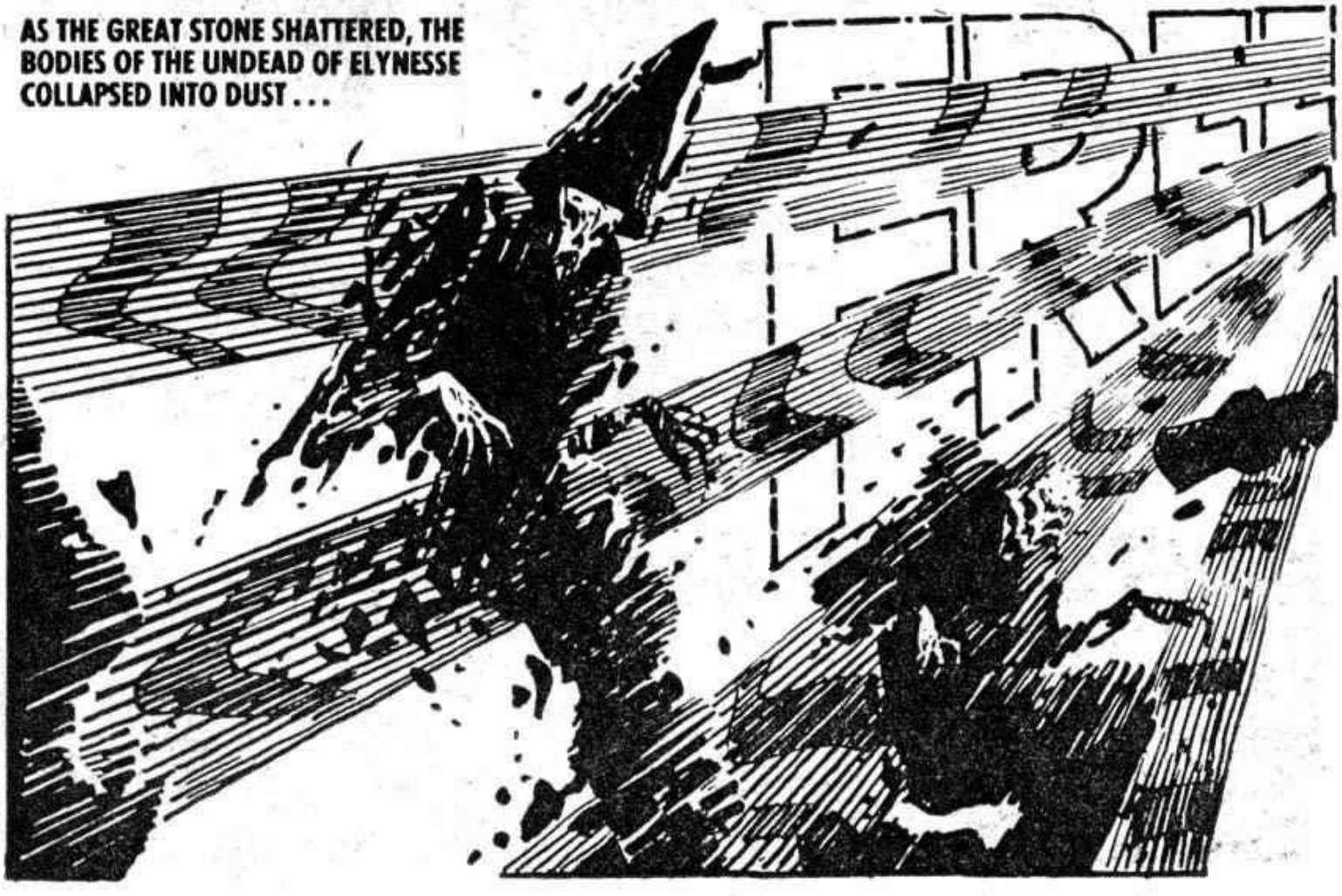
VEYNE LEAPT ASHORE —
WHAT ARE YOU? AND HOW DID YOU KNOW WHO I AM?
WE ARE THE CURSED SOULS OF ELYNESSE, DOOMED TO LIVE UNTIL THE DAY THE GOLDEN BLADE FREES US. SO IT HAS BEEN SINCE WE SINNED AGAINST VISHENA AND ELYNESSE SANK.

FREE YOU? AFTER YOU'VE LOST ME GOOD MEN AND A SHIP?
VISHENA DECREED OUR FATE, SAYING WE WILL FIND PEACE ONLY WHEN THE SWORD THOU DOST CARRY SMASHES THE SOUL-GEM IN HIS TEMPLE. WE CREATED THE BLOOD-RED CURRENT TO BRING SHIPS HERE, HOPING ONE DAY TO LURE THE ONE WE CRAVED.

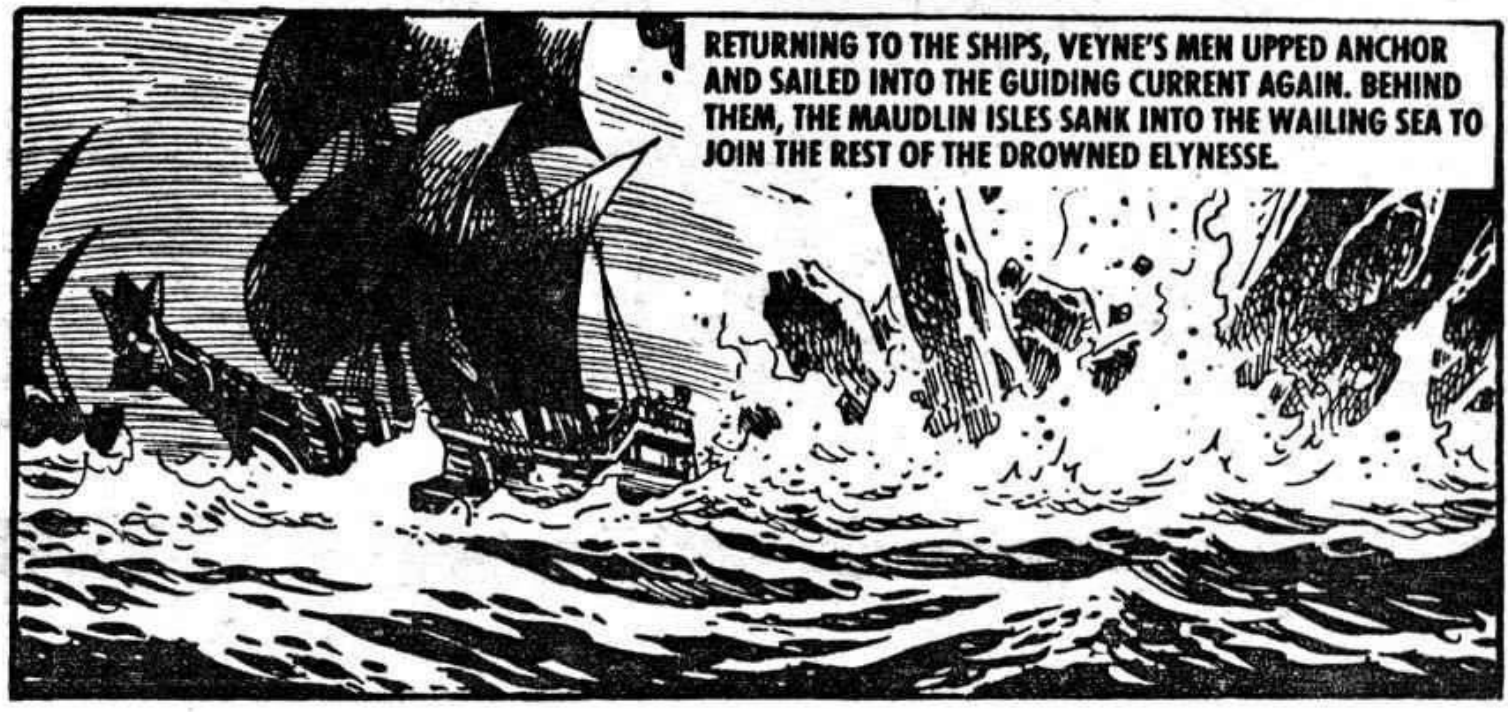
INTRIGUED, VEYNE ALLOWED HIMSELF TO BE LED UP TO THE TEMPLE, AMONG THE ROCKS.

THE SOUL-GEM, KING VEYNE. SHATTER IT, AND WE MAY FIND PEACE IN DEATH AT LAST.
WHAT DO YOU SAY, MYRDAN? IT'S VISHENA I HAVE TO PETITION — I DON'T WISH TO OFFEND HIM.
I SENSE A DESTINY IN THIS, MAJESTY. IF VISHENA HAS DECREED THAT CERASTES WILL ONE DAY FREE THESE DAMNED SOULS, HE CAN HARDLY BE OFFENDED.

VEYNE BROUGHT CERASTES DOWN ON THE GEM WITH ALL HIS STRENGTH — AND IT SHATTERED WITH A BLINDING FLASH.
CLANG!


AS THE GREAT STONE SHATTERED, THE BODIES OF THE UNDEAD OF ELYNESSE COLLAPSED INTO DUST . . .

. . . AND THE GRATEFUL SPIRITS OF THE CURSED RACE ASCENDED TO THE HEAVENS.
LEAVE WITH OUR ETERNAL GRATITUDE,KING VEYNE — BUT QUICKLY. THESE FEW RUINS WILL COLLAPSE, NOW THEY HAVE NO PURPOSE. WE WILL DIRECT THE CRIMSON STREAM TO CARRY THEE TO L'AMERQ.
IT IS ENOUGH, SPIRIT. BE AT PEACE NOW.


RETURNING TO THE SHIPS, VEYNE'S MEN UPPED ANCHOR AND SAILED INTO THE GUIDING CURRENT AGAIN. BEHIND THEM, THE MAUDLIN ISLES SANK INTO THE WAILING SEA TO JOIN THE REST OF THE DROWNED ELYNESSE.

WHAT EXACTLY IS THIS SWORD, MYRDAN? CURSED TO DESTROY ITS OWNER, YET FATED TO LIFT ANOTHER CURSE . . .
THE GODS ARE DEVIOUS, MAJESTY. TO THEM, FATE IS LIKE A VAST CHESS GAME, WITH ENDLESS GAMBITS AND COUNTER-PLOYS.

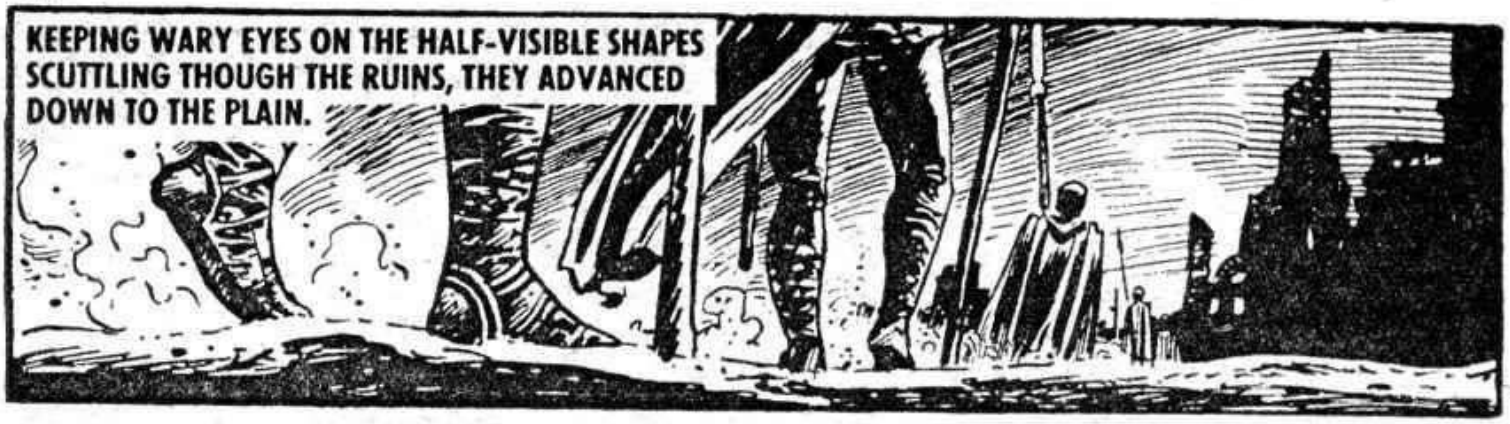
THE DAYS WORE ON, AND THE TWO SHIPS SPED WESTWARD ALONG THE CRIMSON STREAM AT AN UNDREAMT OF SPEED. THEN, AS THEY NEARED THE VERY SHORE OF L'AMERQ . . .
VISHENA SAVE US!
A VISION BORN OF UTTER EVIL GREETED VEYNE. SO THICKLY DID THE CREATURES SWARM THAT THE SEA SEEMED TO BE A SOLID MASS OF MUTATED LIFE.

NO SOONER DID THE SHIPS' BOWS TOUCH THE SQUIRMING WEED THAN THE ASSAULT BEGAN.
STAY BACK! THEY CAN'T HURT YOU — AND A SIMPLE CHARM WILL PROTECT US!

AS THE MAGICIAN-SAGE CHANTED STRANGE WORDS IN A CLEAR, HIGH VOICE, THE CLINGING MASS PARTED TO LET THE TWO GALLEONS THROUGH.

LANDFALL WAS SOON MADE —
WILL THE SHIPS BE SAFE OUT THERE?
THEY'RE ADEQUATELY GUARDED, I ASSURE YOU, MAJESTY. OUR ONLY CONCERN IS FINDING VISHENA'S TEMPLE.

TOPPING THE RISE UP FROM THE BEACH, THEY BEHELD A GRIM SPECTACLE.
I NEVER EXPECTED THIS, MYRDAN! A CITY?
THERE'S THE TEMPLE, MAJESTY! IN THE CENTRE.


KEEPING WARY EYES ON THE HALF-VISIBLE SHAPES SCUTTLING THOUGH THE RUINS, THEY ADVANCED DOWN TO THE PLAIN.

WHAT IS THIS PLACE, MYRDAN? WHAT MANNER OF PEOPLE LIVED HERE?
I REALLY CANNOT SAY, MAJESTY.
QUICKLY, THEY MADE THEIR WAY THROUGH THE SILENT REMAINS TOWARDS THE TEMPLE.

THIS IS IT, VISHENA'S TEMPLE! THE END OF OUR QUEST.
BEWARE ATTACKERS!

. . . AND A WAVE OF HORRORS SWEPT OVER THEM!
TAKE CARE! THESE THINGS WON'T BE SCARED OFF BY A FEW CHARMS!

BY ALL THE GODS, MYRDAN! L'AMERQ SEEMS MORE DAMNED THAN ELYNESSE!
AYE, IT'S A STRANGE PLACE INDEED, MAJESTY!

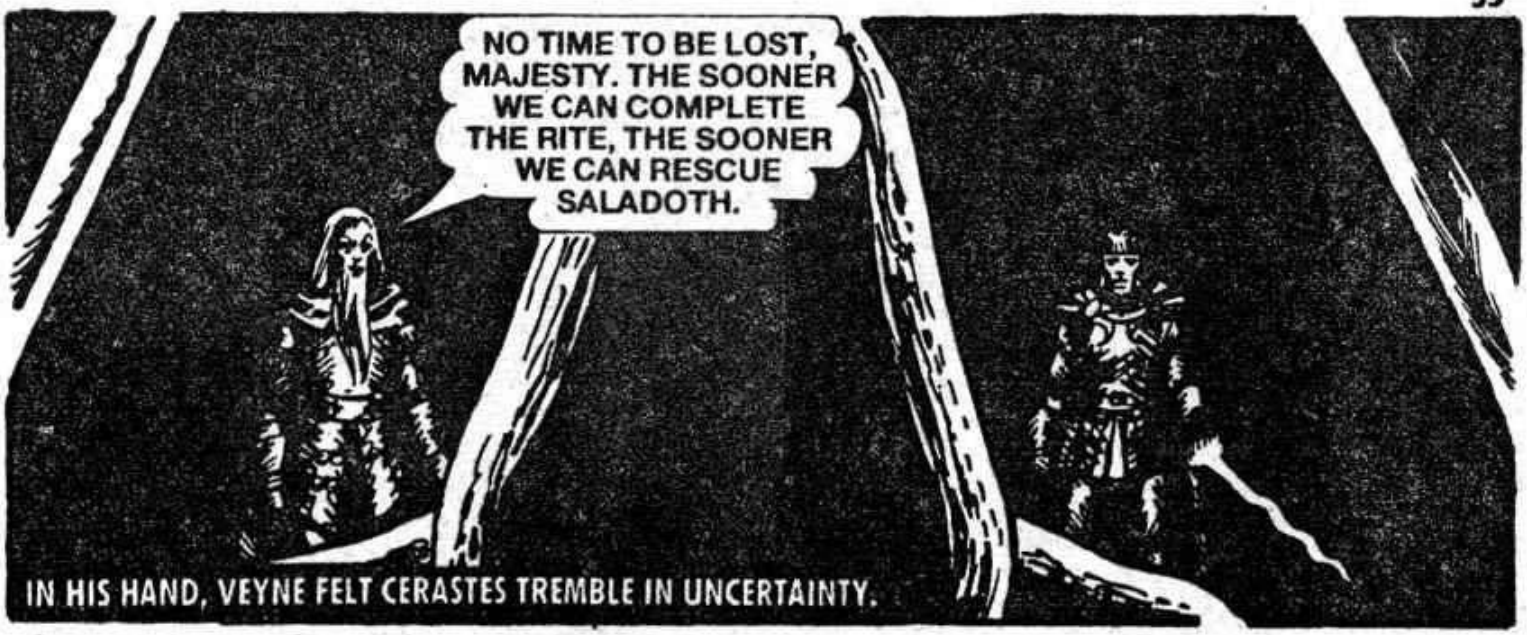
MY PRINCE! GET INSIDE THE TEMPLE, QUICK! WE'LL HOLD THEM OFF!
DON'T BE A FOOL, SALADOTH! YOU CAN'T DEFEAT THESE THINGS ALONE!

SADLY, MAJESTY, THE GOOD CAPTAIN HAS A POINT!
LET ME GO! WHAT ARE YOU . . . ?
UNCEREMONIOUSLY, VEYNE WAS BUNDLED INSIDE.

AS THE DOOR SLAMMED SHUT BEHIND HIM, VEYNE ANGRILY STALKED DEEPER INTO THE DUSTY TEMPLE.
I APPRECIATE YOUR CONCERN, MYRDAN — BUT SOMETIMES I THINK YOU FORGET YOURSELF! I AM YOUR KING, AFTER ALL! MYRDAN? WHAT'S THE MATTER?

NOTHING, MAJESTY. YOU WERE SAYING?

VEYNE MOVED DEEPER INTO THE TEMPLE, AND A GREAT STATUE LOOMED OUT OF THE DARKNESS.
VISHENA! I'VE FOUND YOU AT LAST!


NO TIME TO BE LOST, MAJESTY. THE SOONER WE CAN COMPLETE THE RITE, THE SOONER WE CAN RESCUE SALADOTH.
IN HIS HAND, VEYNE FELT CERASTES TREMBLE IN UNCERTAINTY.

AS MYRDAN BEGAN HIS INVOCATION, POWER CRACKLED FROM HIS FINGER TIPS AND CHARGED THE VERY AIR.
GEBORATH NIMOR! TETARI GEBORATH ABANAI ERROI! BRATH NIMOR Y'GOTH! ERROI! ERROI!

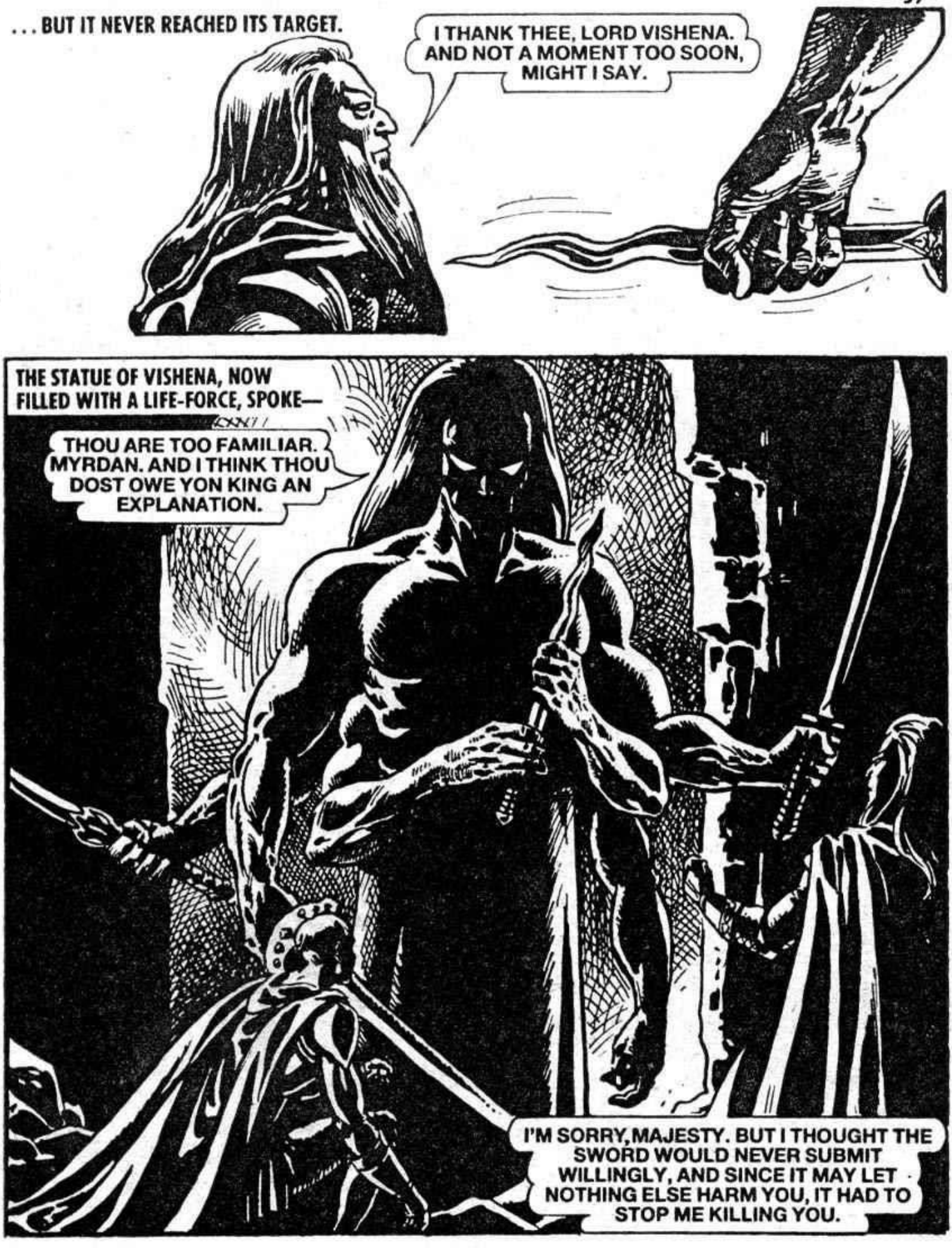
IT IS DONE,MAJESTY. IF YOU WOULD PLACE CERASTES ON THE ALTAR BESIDE YOU.
WITH GREAT RELIEF, THE KING LAID THE GOLDEN SWORD ACROSS THE STONE . . .

. . . ONLY TO FIND HE COULD NOT LET IT GO!
MYRDAN! MY HAND'S STUCK TO THE HILT!

FOR THE FIRST TIME, THE MAGICIAN-SAGE DREW HIS BLACK RAPIER —
I FEARED THIS! VERY WELL, MAJESTY, DEFEND YOURSELF — I INTEND TO KILL YOU!
MYRDAN! HAVE YOU GONE MAD?
TOO SHOCKED TO REACT HIMSELF, VEYNE FELT CERASTES RISE OF ITS OWN WILL AND BLOCK THE CUT.

MYRDAN JUGGLED HIS SWORD FROM HAND TO HAND—
YOUR PARDON, MAJESTY, BUT I HAVE NO CHOICE!

FINALLY, UNABLE TO PROTECT ITS OWNER FROM THE SIMULTANEOUS ATTACKS OF SWORD AND SORCERY, THE GOLDEN SWORD TOOK THE ONLY ACTION IT COULD . . .
CERASTES! NO!


. . . BUT IT NEVER REACHED ITS TARGET.
I THANK THEE, LORD VISHENA. AND NOT A MOMENT TOO SOON, MIGHT I SAY.
THE STATUE OF VISHENA, NOW FILLED WITH A LIFE-FORCE, SPOKE—
THOU ARE TOO FAMILIAR. MYRDAN. AND I THINK THOU DOST OWE YON KING AN EXPLANATION.
I'M SORRY, MAJESTY. BUT I THOUGHT THE SWORD WOULD NEVER SUBMIT WILLINGLY, AND SINCE IT MAY LET NOTHING ELSE HARM YOU, IT HAD TO STOP ME KILLING YOU.

CERASTES IS ONE OF THE SIX BLADES OF FATE, TO BE WIELDED ONLY BY MYSELF. BUT EONS AGO, QUARRELS BETWIXT THE GODS THAT LAID WASTE THIS LAND SCATTERED THE SWORDS ACROSS THE MANY UNIVERSES. IT HAS TAKEN MORE YEARS THAN THOU COULDST IMAGINE TO TRACE THEM ALL — BUT NOW I HAVE THEM AGAIN, AND MAY REPAIR THE HARM ONCE DONE.

YOU'VE USED ME, MYRDAN!
NO, YOUR MAJESTY! ONLY A HUMAN COULD CARRY CERASTES AND FULFIL ITS DESTINY. I ADMIT WE MANIPULATED YOU A LITTLE, BUT THE PEOPLE OF ELYNESSE ARE FREE AND THE GOLDEN BLADE RETURNED TO L'AMERQ AND THE CITY ETERNAL ONCE MORE.

WHO ARE YOU REALLY, MYRDAN? AND WHAT OF THE SIXTH BLADE OF FATE?
I AM THE MAGICIAN MYRDAN OF THIS WORLD, MAJESTY, AND THE SIXTH BLADE IS MY OWN.

BUT I AM ALSO VISHENA OF THE SWORDS.
AND I HAVE MINE OWN DESTINY TO FULFIL. WITHOUT ALL SIX SWORDS VISHENA HAS NO POWER. . .
TO VEYNE'S AMAZEMENT, MYDRDAN SEEMED TO MERGE WITH THE FIGURE OF VISHENA.

VISHENA OF THE SWORDS WAS OUT OF THE TEMPLE IN ONE STRIDE, JOINING THE FRAY THAT STILL RAGED OUTSIDE.
. . . BUT WITH THEM I AM INVINCIBLE!
VISHENA! A MIRACLE!

SPIRALLING OUT FROM HIS TEMPLE, VISHENA RUTHLESSLY DESTROYED THE CORRUPTED REMAINS OF THE CITY ETERNAL, AND A NEW CITY OF LIGHT AND WONDER SPRANG INTO BEING FROM AGE-OLD EVIL IN HIS WAKE.

THE CITY ETERNAL IS RESTORED! THAT WHICH EXISTS ON EVERY WORLD AND EVERY UNIVERSE IS WHOLE AGAIN!
VISHENA'S VOICE ECHOED ACROSS THE GLEAMING NEW CITY TO THE DISTANT MOUNTAINS.
WE'VE LIVED TO SEE A LEGEND BORN.
AYE, MY PRINCE. MAGIC AND SPECTACLE ENOUGH TO CONVINCE EVEN THIS OLD SCEPTIC.

MYRDAN APPEARED THROUGH THE MARBLE STREETS, NOW RESTORED TO FLESH AND BLOOD.
THE CIRCLE IS CLOSED, THE BALANCE RESTORED. YOU HAVE OUR THANKS, MAJESTY — ALL OF YOU.
IT WOULD SEEM THE GODS CANNOT DO EVERYTHING THEMSELVES, THEN.
TRUE — AND THAT IS WHY WE WILL ALWAYS NEED HEROES. BUT YOU MUST GO NOW, MAJESTY — THE CITY ETERNAL IS NOT FOR THE HUMAN RACE. NOT YET.
I UNDERSTAND, MYRDAN — OR WHATEVER YOUR NAME REALLY IS. FAREWELL — BE SURE I'LL NEVER FORGET YOU.

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DEMON SWORD

ANGLERRE WAS UNDER ATTACK FROM THE POWERS OF EVIL. THE ONLY WAY TO TRIUMPH WAS FOR THE YOUNG PRINCE OF ANGLERRE TO SEEK OUT, AND USE, CERASTES, A MAGICAL SWORD. BUT CERASTES HAD A DEADLY PRICE . . . IT WOULD EVENTUALLY KILL ITS OWNER.